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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN ENVIRONMENTAL UPDATE, APRIL

¶1. Summary: This information is drawn primarily from the Kazakhstani press and has not been verified. The opinions expressed in this report should not be interpreted as official positions and/or policy of the U.S. Government.

- Russia and Kazakhstan to Form Uranium-Related JV
- Smuggling of Radioactive Materials from Kazakhstan to Iran and Tajikistan Detected
- KAZSAT Launch Postponed from June 8 to June 18
- Kazakhstani Scientists and Ecologists Favor Creation of an Emergency Response Service in Case of Oil Spills
- Ecological Requirements for Subsurface Users Should Be Toughened
- Prevalence of HIV/AIDS Growing in Kazakhstan
- Bone Marrow Transplant Center to Be Built in Almaty
- Ban on Import of Caviar Extended
- Scientists Propose New Method of Sewage Purification -
- Discord on Use of Cross-Border Water Resources Poses Threat to Kazakhstan's Crops
- Mazhilis Debates Draft Law on Environmental Standards for Automobiles
- "Kzylorda Steppe Could Save the Earth's Climate"
- CIS Bird Flu Monitoring Center Planned in Russia
- Fish Leave Northern Aral Sea
- Oil Producers Emit Pollutants at Night

End Summary.

Russia and Kazakhstan to Form Uranium-Related JV

¶2. A bilateral working group on cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy has drafted a report and an action plan on integrating the nuclear complexes of Russia and Kazakhstan. According to Techsnabexport, which is in charge of implementing uranium projects with Kazakhstan, this plan would establish joint ventures in uranium mining and processing in Kazakhstan. The action plan also provides for increased bilateral cooperation in designing and implementing innovative projects with regards to nuclear energy and the creation of a nuclear fuel cycle. Work is scheduled to be completed by late 2006 or early 2007. (Interfax-Kazakhstan, May 15, 2006)

Smuggling of Radioactive Materials from Kazakhstan to Iran and Tajikistan Detected

¶3. Customs officers in Uzbekistan reported two incidents of smuggling of radioactive materials from Kazakhstan to Iran and Tajikistan. The Uzbek Institute of Nuclear Physics determined that zinc waste en route to Iran had been contaminated by the radioactive nuclide Cesium-137.

Radioactive materials were also detected during the inspection of a container en route to Tajikistan. In this instance, samples of molybdenum contained such radioactive materials as Radium-226, Uranium-234, Uranium-238 and Thorium-234. Legal proceedings have been initiated in both cases. (Interfax-Kazakhstan, May 11, 2006)

KAZSAT Launch Postponed from June 8 to June 18, 2006

¶4. The launch of the first Kazakstani communications satellite, KazSat, was postponed from June 8 to June 18, according to the Chairman of Kazakhstan's State Agency for Information and Communications, Askar Zhumagaliev. (Interfax-Kazakhstan, May 15, 2006)

Kazakhstani Scientists and Ecologists Favor Creation of
Emergency Response Service in Case of Oil Spills

¶5. An international conference on ecological problems associated with development in the Caspian Sea shelf was held in Aktau on May 13. At the event, Gulmira Ismagulova, an official from the Ministry of Education and Science, proposed the formation of an Emergency Response Service for oil spills. This service would be subordinate to the Ministry of Environment and would be financed by companies engaged in the development of the Caspian Sea shelf. (Interfax-Kazakhstan, May 13, 2006)

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Ecological Requirements for Subsurface Users Should Be
Toughened

¶6. The Minister of Environment, Nurlan Iskakov, recommended tougher requirements for subsurface users of the Caspian at a May 15 meeting in Aktau. Iskakov pointed to the recent deaths of large numbers of fish and seals, and said that it is necessary to prohibit oil blow-outs, associated gas flaring, and the disposal of waste on the sea floor. Ecologists and scientists believe that oil blow-outs, and probably hydrogen sulphide poisoning, were responsible for the animal deaths. Experts suspect that oil leaked from a flooded 1960s-era oil well in the Pribrezhnoye oil field. (Khabar, May 15, 2006)

Prevalence of HIV/AIDS Growing in Kazakhstan

¶7. 424 new cases of HIV infection were reported in Kazakhstan in January-March 2006. This is up from 174 cases reported in the same period last year. According to the National Statistics Agency, 159 people were diagnosed with HIV in Kazakhstan during March alone (versus 64 in March 2005). On January 1, 2005, 5,440 HIV-infected persons were officially registered in the country. By April 2006, that number had risen to 6,081. (Interfax-Kazakhstan, May 17, 2006)

Bone Marrow Transplant Center to Be Built in Almaty

¶8. A bone marrow transplant center will be built in Almaty, announced Kulan Omarova, a professor at the Scientific Center for Pediatrics and Pediatric Surgery. Construction

is scheduled to be completed by year's end. According to the Kazakh Scientific and Research Institute of Oncology and Radiology, the number of people suffering from leukemia has increased in recent years. In 2000, leukemia was the 8th most prevalent form of cancer. In 2005, it ranked 6th. (Komsomolskaya Pravda, May 20, 2006; Interfax-Kazakhstan, May 18, 2006)

Ban on Export of Caviar Extended

¶9. According to Kazinform, the UN extended the ban on caviar exports from Caspian Sea littoral states, with the exception of Iran, for an indefinite period of time. UN representatives said that before extending the ban, they offered exporting countries the opportunity to submit plans to combat smuggling and to maintain a viable sturgeon population. As no satisfactory plans were submitted, the UN determined that the ban should continue. The ban affects 90% of world caviar reserves. (Ecological Courier, May 15-June 1, 2006)

Scientists Propose New Method of Sewage Purification

¶10. On May 23, scientists from the Institute of Energy and Communications presented a new project for saving the largest sewage pond of Almaty, Sorbulak. According to project manager Pak Lubov, contamination of the water in Sorbulak has reached critical levels and only the construction of biological ponds (water grass and bacteria) can help prevent ecological disaster. The contaminated water, which is already killing large numbers of fish, is seeping into the ground and thus potentially represents a human health threat. The project aims to stop this seepage, as well as to reduce the amount of pollutants released into the atmosphere as pond water evaporates. Project implementation will require 15 million KZT (\$125,000). If the plan is fully implemented, 100% of the water would be purified and could be used for agriculture. (Interfax-Kazakhstan, May 23, 2006)

Discord on Use of Cross-Border Water Resources Poses Threat to Kazakhstan's Crops

¶11. A source from Kazakhstan's Ministry of Agriculture told

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Interfax that the disparity among Central Asian states on the use of cross-border water resources threatens crops in southern Kazakhstan. Discussions on this topic have been difficult due to disagreements over water intake from the Syrdariya River. According to the source, Uzbekistan refuses to sign a quadripartite agreement with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan on limiting water intake. As a result, cotton crops in southern Kazakhstan may be lost. While there are an estimated 70,000 hectares of arable rice plantations in southern Kazakhstan, there is only enough irrigation water for 60,000 hectares. The source was confident that neighboring states have enough irrigation water, and could easily meet Kazakhstan's needs. However, he charged that they were intentionally limiting the amount of water flowing into the Syrdariya River. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, water reserves held at the Toktogul reservoir totaled 14.205 ml cubic meters as of May 22, which is the same as last year. Meanwhile, the Kairakkum reservoir has already exceeded its maximum limit of 3.4 ml cubic meters. Water discharges this year have been reduced from 600-800 cubic meters/s to 450 cubic meters/s. (Interfax-Kazakhstan, May 24, 2006)

¶12. The Mazhilis, the lower house of Kazakhstan's Parliament, accepted for consideration a draft law on tougher environmental standards for automobiles. The draft law was initiated by a group of Mazhilis members, along with several deputy groups that support Almaty's bid to host the 2014 Olympic Games. The draft law consists of a series of amendments (to the Motor Vehicle law and the Criminal Code, among others). Proponents of the law insist that European fuel and emissions standards be introduced in Kazakhstan. (Interfax-Kazakhstan, May 24, 2006)

"Kyzylorda Steppe Could Save the Earth's Climate"

¶13. Dutch environmental activist Elmer Base believes that the Kyzylorda steppes could provide electric power for the whole planet. Base identified 320 square kilometers in northern Kyzylorda that are unfit for agriculture. According to his calculations, if a solar power station were built at this location, it would be possible to produce 10,000 gigawatts of electricity in the summer and 5,000 in winter. Annually, the world consumes about 15,000 gigawatts of energy (from oil, uranium, water energy, etc). Currently there are no power transmission lines to transport such a volume of electric power from the Kyzylorda region. However, Base predicts this will change as solar energy becomes a more attractive power source. (liter.kz, May 23, 2006)

Fish Leave Northern Aral Sea

¶14. The first phase of a project on the regulation of the Syrdarya riverbed is over. The construction of the Kok-Aral dam has made it possible to fill the northern part of the Aral Sea ahead of schedule. Once it was full, sluices were opened to let spare water into the southern part of the sea. But a new problem arose: most of the fish went south too. The water in the southern part is salty and fish cannot survive there for long. According to fishermen, the project envisaged a fish protection screen, but this task had been overlooked. Soon the second phase of the project will be implemented and it is expected that a suitable fish protection system will be in place. Until that time, the issue of saving the fish remains open. (Kazakhstan-1, May 24, 2006)

Oil Producers Emit Pollutants at Night

¶15. The Aktobe Regional Procurator's Office announced that oil producers were grossly violating environmental laws by secretly emitting pollutants into the atmosphere at night.

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A special commission investigated the air in three settlements at different times of day. At night, emission levels exceeded daily indicators by 10 times. There were also violations regarding the release of dangerous reagents during transportation and storage at local petroleum storage depots. Additionally, investigators found several cases in

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populated areas and zones of economic agents where the concentrations of pollutants in the atmosphere exceeded allowable levels. The Procurator's office is taking measures in response to these violations. (Channel 31, May 24, 2006)

